



## Strategy Spotlight

# Interview Tips and Techniques

Use these tips and techniques the next time you conduct an interview.

### A. Getting Ready for the Interview

1. **What is your purpose in doing the interview?**  
What do you want to find out? It is easier to ask good questions if you have background knowledge. Find out all you can about the topic and the person you're planning to interview.
2. **Brainstorm a list of questions, then choose the best ones.**  
Use 5WH questions, or questions that ask for more than a yes/no answer. Try to select questions that only the person can answer. Some questions can ask for facts, and others for opinions. The questions you ask depend on your purpose and topic. Prepare six to eight questions for a 15-minute interview. You may not need to use them all.
3. **Think about the order of your questions.**  
Does it seem logical? Would a different order work better? Decide which questions are most important for your purpose. Ask those questions first.
4. **How will you record the interview?**  
If you want to use a tape recorder, ask your subject for permission, then practise using the machine. If you are taking notes, be prepared to abbreviate words that are likely to come up.
5. **When you contact your subject to schedule the interview, be able to explain your purpose in a sentence or two.**

### B. During the Interview

1. **Listen actively.**  
As your subject answers, think of follow-up questions you would like to ask. Jot these down and ask them when appropriate. Don't interrupt your subject in the middle of an answer.
2. **Be ready to change the order of your questions.**  
If you ask one question and your subject talks about something you were going to ask later, switch to the new topic.
3. **Take lots of notes during the interview, even if you are taping it.**  
If you don't understand an answer, ask your subject to explain it a different way.  
If you need more time to write an answer, politely ask your subject to wait while you finish.
4. **You might make a few notes about how your subject looks and acts.**  
These details could be used later to enrich your writing.
5. **Thank your subject for the interview.**  
Check whether you can contact him or her later if you have further questions.

### C. After the Interview

1. **Rewrite your notes.**  
As soon as possible after the interview, review your notes and clearly rewrite words that were scribbled. If you think of new questions, write them down. You might be able to ask your subject these questions later, or you might be able to find the answers yourself.
2. **Choose the direct quotations you would like to feature.**
3. **Choose words carefully.**  
You don't have to use every word your subject said. You can shorten the answers as long as you don't change the meaning.
4. **Consider what ideas you can add to your writing folder to follow up later.**
5. **Evaluate your role in the interview.**  
Did your questions get the information you wanted? Did you listen attentively?  
How could you have improved the interview? What will you do differently next time you interview someone?